



Ontario Home Economics Association

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Ask A Professional Home Economist

For Immediate Release

Reality Check: *Baby Think It Over*[®]

by Maria McLellan, P.H.Ec.

When high school students bring home an infant simulator, there is no doubt that the whole family is affected. An infant simulator is a computerized baby look-alike that requires tending on a regular basis, which means right through the night. This resource is aptly called “*Baby Think It Over*” and is available from Torcomp Systems Limited in Mississauga.

Teachers of secondary school parenting classes often assign a sleep-robbing activity for their students: taking home a bundle of concern. Teachers may give the “infant” to a prepared student for 48 hours or longer. The student is instructed to care for the simulator as if it was a real baby. Each student must carry many accessories/necessities for their baby. These may include a carrier (often a second-hand car seat), a diaper bag filled with clothing, bottles of “formula” (water), diapers, wet naps, and a logsheet to keep track of baby’s crying periods.

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The simulators look like very real babies and students are instructed to treat their “infants” as if they were theirs. They must assume responsibility for the baby’s whereabouts every minute of the day. They are the only ones who can tend to the baby, as their teachers have attached to their arm the device that stops the baby from crying. Different models of the simulators have their own type of devices that require particular kinds of tending. Teachers can select a crying mode: either quiet, normal or cranky, but the crying schedule cannot be regulated – this is done when the internal computerized box is activated.

This simulation program has been very successful in providing students with the opportunity to demonstrate their parenting skills and to realize the constant responsibility that comes with parenting a child. Students are prepared to be awakened in the night about three or four times, and to possibly tend to the baby even while they are showering, should the infant cry at that time. If they do not respond to the crying infant within a certain time period, the computer recognizes their unresponsiveness and notes a “neglect”. Other unacceptable parental behaviours are also registered, such as abuses (to the head especially) and unsupported head position, as well as the number of minutes the infant cried in total.

Students, both male and female, may take the baby during the week or on the weekend. They are instructed to try to live their lives as normal, but often adjustments need to be made, especially if the student has a part-time job and cannot bring the baby to work. There are approximately 1,100 to 1,200 simulators in use in schools across Ontario.

Some teachers may require the completion of a baby book to help students focus on their allotted time with the baby, and to communicate their self-reflection concerning how they performed as a parent and what they learned about the experience. These pupils often indicate that parenting is a full-time job that can be very expensive, especially if you are still a teenager who does not have the maturity or the resources of a working adult.

Parenting students are able to see how people treat them when it is assumed that their baby is real. Students come back to tell stories about the looks and comments they received when out in the community. It gives teenagers the opportunity to rethink their attitudes and ideas about sexual activity. Students suggest that this “take-home” project is very valuable because these real-life experiences are not easily forgotten.

Many students who have had the chance to take a parenting course comment that it should be a mandatory course for all high school students. They realize that most students will eventually be parents or, at the very least, will have to deal with children at some time in their life, either at work or within the community. Many begin to understand that premature entry into parenthood is a lot of physical and emotional work, which demands their time and money.

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Often students are stressed about the complete change in their life routines during the period of time with the baby. They are on call throughout their assigned time and are not able to hang out with their friends in the same way as before. Many indicate that this is a true reality check for them; having a baby at this time in their lives is not what most want.

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***The Ontario Home Economics Association,** a self-regulated body of Professional Home Economists, promotes high professional standards among its members so that they may assist families and individuals to achieve and maintain a desirable quality of life.*

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